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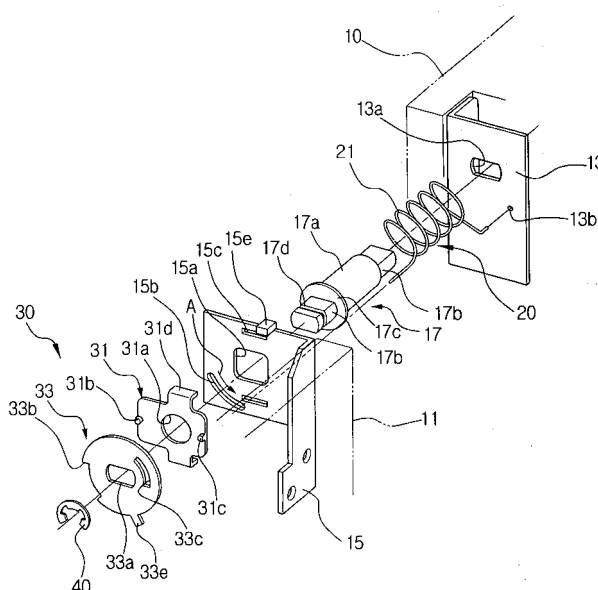
This application was filed on 02 - 10 - 2003 as a
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(54) **Hinge**

(57) A hinge includes a fixing bracket (13) fixed on a body (10), a supporting bracket fixed (15) on the panel (11) and a hinge shaft (17) fixed to the fixing bracket (13) to rotatably support the supporting bracket (15). The hinge also includes an automatic pivot unit to cause the panel to be opened with respect to the body by a predetermined free rotation angle when a locking state between the panel and the body is removed. Further, the hinge includes a manual pivot unit to provide a frictional

force between the supporting bracket and the hinge shaft. The frictional force restricts the supporting bracket from being automatically rotated by the automatic pivot unit and also fixes the panel, which is opened further from the predetermined free rotation angle, in a fixed position. The hinge includes a fixing pin connected to one end of the hinge shaft to restrict the hinge shaft, the supporting bracket, the automatic pivot unit and the manual pivot unit from being separated from each other.

FIG.2



Description

[0001] The present invention relates to a hinge comprising first and second means for connecting the hinge to first and second structures, a shaft fixed to said first means and about which the second means can rotate and brake means for holding the first and second means for enabling the first and second means to be set in position relative to each other.

[0002] Recently, there has been a great improvement in and marketing of folding electronic appliances such as camcorders and laptop computers in which an LCD panel is hinged to the appliance's body.

[0003] Figure 1 shows an example of a conventional hinge apparatus employed in a laptop computer. As shown in Figure 1, the hinge apparatus includes a fixing bracket 3 disposed on a body 1, a supporting bracket 4 fixed to a panel 2 that is opened and closed with respect to the body 1, a hinge shaft 5 connected to the fixing bracket 3 and the supporting bracket 4, a plurality of washers 6 disposed on the hinge shaft 5 and a plate spring 7.

[0004] In the above-described configuration, the supporting bracket 4 is connected between the washers 6, while the plate spring 7 is connected between the supporting shaft 4 and the washers 6. Accordingly, due to the elastic force of the plate spring 7, a frictional force is generated between the supporting shaft 4 and the washers 6. Due to the frictional force, the panel 2 is prevented from pivoting freely with respect to the body 1 when the appliance is open or closed. When the panel 2 is opened with respect to the body 1 by a predetermined angle, the panel 2 is fixed in its position by the frictional force. More specifically, a user may adjust the angle of the panel 2 with respect to the body 1 moving the panel 2 up or down manually.

[0005] The above-described configuration is one of typical examples of the hinge apparatus, which needs an improvement in terms of handling. That is, even when a locking device, for holding the appliance closed, is released, the panel 2 remains tightly contacted with the body 1 and it is hard for the user to open the panel 2 manually.

[0006] A hinge according to the present invention is characterised by means arranged such that the brake means becomes operative at a predetermined angle between the first and second means.

[0007] Preferably, a hinge according to the present invention comprises resilient means for biasing the hinge, when closed, towards an open position. More preferably, the resilient means comprises coil spring and the shaft extends axially through the spring. Still more preferably, a hinge according to the present invention comprises means for removing said bias substantially at said predetermined angle which may be a slot in the second means receiving an end of the spring.

[0008] Preferably, the brake means is mounted for rotation with the second means and comprises a projec-

tion and the means arranged such that the brake means becomes operative at a predetermined angle comprises a member fixed relative to the shaft and having a slot or cut-out for receiving said projection when the hinge is opened less than said predetermined angle, said projection bearing against said member to provide braking when the hinge is opened by said predetermined angle or a greater angle.

[0009] An embodiment of the present invention will now be described, by way of example, with reference to Figures 2 to 7 of the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a schematic view showing a conventional hinge;

Figure 2 is an exploded view of a hinge according to the present invention;

Figure 3 is a perspective view showing the hinge of Figure 2;

Figures 4A and 4B are a side view and a front view, respectively, showing the hinge of Figure 2 in its closed state;

Figure 5 is a side view showing a supporting bracket of the hinge of Figure 2 rotated by approximately 45°;

Figures 6A and 6B are a side view and a front view, respectively, showing the supporting bracket being rotated by approximately 180°; and

Figure 7 is a schematic side view showing the supporting bracket being rotated by approximately 210°.

[0010] Referring to Figure 2, a hinge according to the present invention is employed to connect a panel 11 to a body 10 of an appliance so that the panel 11 can be opened and closed with respect to the body 10. The hinge apparatus includes a fixing bracket 13 fixed onto the body 10, a supporting bracket 15 fixed to the panel 11, a hinge shaft 17, an automatic pivot unit 20, a manual pivot unit 30, and a fixing pin 40.

[0011] A laptop computer will be used herein as an example of appliance in which a hinge according to the present invention, and accordingly, the body 10 is the laptop computer body, and the panel 11 is an LCD panel of the laptop computer. A general locking device is disposed between the body 10 and the panel 11. Accordingly, when a user desires to open the panel 11 with respect to the body 10, he/she may open it after releasing the locking device.

[0012] The fixing bracket 13 is fixed onto the body 10 by screws (not shown). The fixing bracket 13 has a fixing hole 13a through which the hinge shaft 17 is fixed, and a supporting hole 13b to which one end of a coil spring 21, which will be described later, is fixed. The fixing hole 13a is non-circular.

[0013] The supporting bracket 15 is fixed to the panel 11 by screws (not shown). The supporting bracket 15 faces the fixing bracket 13 at a predetermined distance. Also, the supporting bracket 15 has a shaft hole 15a

through which the hinge shaft 17 extends, and a guide hole 15b in which the other end of the coil spring 21 is received. The shaft hole 15a may be circular or non-circular and is larger than an outer circumference of the hinge shaft 17 to that the hinge shaft 17 can move freely therein. With the hinge shaft 17 extending through the shaft hole 15a, the supporting bracket 15 can be rotated relative to the hinge shaft 17.

[0014] The hinge shaft 17 includes a body 17a, having a circular cross-section in its middle, non-circular cross-section fixing portions 17b extending from both ends of the body 17a, and a supporting portion 17c extending between one of the fixing portion 17b and the body 17a. The body 17a is connected to the coil spring 21. The fixing portion 17b is inserted into the fixing hole 13a and the shaft hole 15a. The free end of the fixing portion 17b, inserted through the shaft hole 15a, has a circumferential groove 17d for receiving the circlip 40. The other end 17b is inserted into the fixing hole 13a of the fixing bracket 13 and then completely fixed by being caulked by a caulking device. Alternatively, this end of the fixing portion 17b may also be fastened by a circlip 40.

[0015] The automatic pivot unit 20 is employed so that the panel 11 can open with respect to the body 10 automatically by a predetermined angle when the locking device is released. The automatic pivot unit 20 includes the coil spring 21, disposed on the hinge shaft 17, which elastically biases the panel 11 towards an open position with respect to the body 10. The guide hole 15b formed in the supporting bracket 15 is also part of the automatic pivot unit 20.

[0016] As described above, one end of the coil spring 21 is received in the supporting hole 13b of the fixing bracket 13, while the other end is received in the guide hole 15b of the supporting bracket 15. Thus, when the panel 11 lying parallel to the body 10, the coil spring 21 is under tension. Accordingly, the supporting bracket 15 is pressed in a direction as indicated by an arrow A as shown in Figure 4A. The direction as shown, indicates the opening of the panel 11 with respect to the body 10. When the locking device, holding the panel 11 and the body 10 closed, is released, the supporting bracket 15 is automatically pivoted by a predetermined angle in the direction of the arrow A by the coil spring 21. When the coil spring 21 is fully relaxed and the torsion becomes zero (0), the other end of the coil spring 21 is guided along the guide hole 15b instead of being compressed or decompressed by the supporting bracket 15 in the event that the supporting bracket 15 is further pivoted in the A direction. The torsion of the coil spring 21 is set at an appropriate level so that the panel 11 is automatically opened with respect to the body 10 by an angle of approximately 45°. The guide hole 15b is formed so as to have an appropriate length to correspond to the automatic opening angle of the panel 11.

[0017] The manual pivot unit 30 restricts the angle of automatic rotation of the supporting bracket 15 by the automatic pivot unit 20. The manual pivot unit 30 also

provides a frictional force between the supporting bracket 15 and the hinge shaft 17 to fix the supporting bracket 15 in a fixed position. The supporting bracket 15 is further opened by an external force from the automatic opening angle. The manual pivot unit 30 has a plate spring 31 fixed on the supporting bracket 15, and a friction plate 33 fixed on the hinge shaft 17 in tight contact with the plate spring 31. The plate spring 31 has a shaft hole 31a through which the hinge shaft 17 is passed, a pair of projections 31b, 31c protruding from one side of the plate spring 31, and a coupling portion 31d bent from a portion of an outline of the plate spring 31 opposite to the projections 31b, 31c. The plate spring 31 is fixed onto the supporting bracket 15 and rotated together with the supporting bracket 15. The shaft hole 31a has a circular shape. The projections 31b, 31c protrude from the one side of the plate spring 31. The projections 31b, 31c are also positioned such that their respective distances from the projections 31b, 31c to the shaft hole 31a are different. A coupling portion 31d is positioned to be fixed in a coupling hole 15c that is formed in the supporting bracket 15. Accordingly, the plate spring 31 is fixed onto the supporting bracket 15 and rotated together with the supporting bracket 15.

[0018] The friction plate 33 is formed in tight contact with one surface of the plate spring 31. The friction plate 33 has a coupling hole 33a corresponding to a section of the fixing portion 17b so as to be connected to, and rotated together with the fixing portion 17b of the hinge shaft 17. The frictional plate 33 also has guide holes 33b, 33c corresponding to the projections 31b, 31c of the plate spring 31. Each of the guide holes 33b, 33c receives one of the projections 31b, 31c to guide movement of the projections 31b, 31c. The guide holes 33b, 33c are formed at different distances with respect to the coupling hole 33a. Accordingly, when the plate spring 31 is rotated through said predetermined angle, by the coil spring 21, with the projections 31b, 31c inserted in the guide holes 33b, 33c, there is no frictional force between the frictional plate 33 and the plate spring 31. When the projections 31b, 31c are guided to ends of the guide holes 33b, 33c, free rotation of the supporting bracket 15 is restricted. Then, as the supporting bracket 15 is forcibly rotated by an externally applied force, the projections 31b, 31c are released from the guide holes 33b, 33c to a direct contact with the frictional plate 33, thereby generating a frictional force. Accordingly, the supporting bracket 15 is rotated through an angle of free rotation by the external force. Once the supporting bracket is rotated beyond the angle of the free rotation, the supporting bracket 15 is fixed in its position.

[0019] Here, the supporting bracket 15, the plate spring 31 and the frictional plate 33 are connected to come into tight contact with the supporting portion 17c of the hinge shaft 17 sequentially. Separation from the hinge shaft 17 is prevented by the fixing pin 40.

[0020] Further provided is a pivoting angle restricting device to restrict the angle of rotation of the supporting

bracket 15. The pivoting angle restricting device includes a locking portion 33e protruding from an outline of the frictional plate 33, and a locking projection 15e bent from an outline of the supporting bracket 15 to be locked with the locking portion 33e during rotation. The locking portion 33e is formed in a position that restricts the pivoting angle of the supporting bracket 15 at a predetermined degree of, for example, 210°.

[0021] An operation of the hinge will now be described.

[0022] Referring to Figures 4A and 4B, the projections 31b, 31c of the plate spring 31 are inserted into the guide holes 33b, 33c of the friction plate 33. One end of the coil spring 21 is received at one end of the guide hole 15b. Accordingly, the supporting bracket 15 is resiliently biased in the direction A (as shown in Figure 4A) by the torsion of the coil spring 21.

[0023] When the locking device, between the body 10 and the panel 11, is released, as shown in Figure 5, the supporting bracket 15 is automatically pivoted by approximately 45°, for example, by the coil spring 21. Since the lengths of the guide holes 33b, 33c correspond to an angle of 45°, the projections 31b, 31c are guided along the guide holes 33b, 33c through 45° without being interfered by frictional force or resistance. When the supporting bracket 15 is automatically pivoted (opened) by approximately 45° together with the panel 11, the projections 31b, 31c are moved to the other ends of the guide holes 33b, 33c. Thus, the free rotation of the supporting bracket 15 is restricted. Together with the fixing bracket 13, the hinge shaft 17 and the frictional plate 33 are in fixed positions with respect to the body 10. The supporting bracket 15 and the plate spring 31 are pivoted in the A direction (as shown in Figure 4A) together with the panel 11.

[0024] The panel 11 is moved to the state as shown in Figures 6A and 6B when the panel 11 is forcibly pivoted in the A direction as shown in Figure 5 by approximately 180°. Movement by a user in addition to the free rotation angle of 45° allows for the panel 11 to be positioned in the state as shown in Figures 6A and 6B. Accordingly, the projections 31b, 31c of the plate spring 31 escape from the guide holes 33b, 33c and are positioned in contact with the one surface of the friction plate 33. By the contact between the projections 31b, 31c and the friction plate 33, a frictional force is generated between the friction plate 33 and the plate spring 31. The friction force has an indirect influence on the hinge shaft 17 and the supporting bracket 15. Accordingly, when the panel 11 is opened more than 45°, the opening is enabled by an external force that overcomes the frictional force. When the pivoting is stopped, the panel 11 is fixed in position by the frictional force.

[0025] Figure 7 shows the panel 11 being rotated by approximately 210°. Here, the locking projection 15e is locked with the locking portion 33e, thereby restricting the supporting bracket 15 from further rotation. Here also, the panel end of the coil spring 21 is freely guided

along the guide hole 15b, and the coil spring 21 is kept uncompression.

[0026] As described above, the hinge apparatus according to the present invention provides a first operation, which is automatic, and a second operation, which is manual. By simply releasing the locking device (e.g., like pressing a button), the panel 11 is automatically opened by a predetermined angle. As a result, a body of an appliance becomes easy to use. Also, a user is allowed to adjustably open the panel 11 within an angle ranging from, e.g. about 45° to 210°.

[0027] Also, as described above, the hinge apparatus according to the present invention enables pivoting movement of the supporting bracket 15 with respect to the fixing bracket 13 in a two operation manner. More specifically, since opening in the first operation is performed automatically, while the opening in the second operation is performed manually by the user, the appliance becomes easier to use.

Claims

1. A hinge comprising:

first and second means (13, 15) for connecting the hinge to first and second structures (10, 11), a shaft (17) fixed to said first means (11) and about which the second means (15) can rotate, brake means (31, 33) for holding the first and second means (13, 15) to enable the first and second means to be set in position relative to each other, means (33b, 33c) arranged such that the brake means (31, 33) becomes operative at a predetermined angle between the first and second means (13, 15); and resilient means (21) for biasing the hinge, when closed, towards an open position

characterised by means (15b) for removing said bias substantially at said predetermined angle.

2. A hinge according to claim 1, wherein the resilient means (21) comprises coil spring and the shaft (17) extends axially through the spring.

3. A hinge according to claim 2, wherein the means (15b) for removing said bias comprises a slot in the second means (15) receiving an end of the spring.

4. A hinge according to claim 1, 2 or 3, wherein said predetermined angle is 45°.

5. A hinge according to any preceding claim, wherein the fully open angle of the hinge is 210°.

FIG. 1

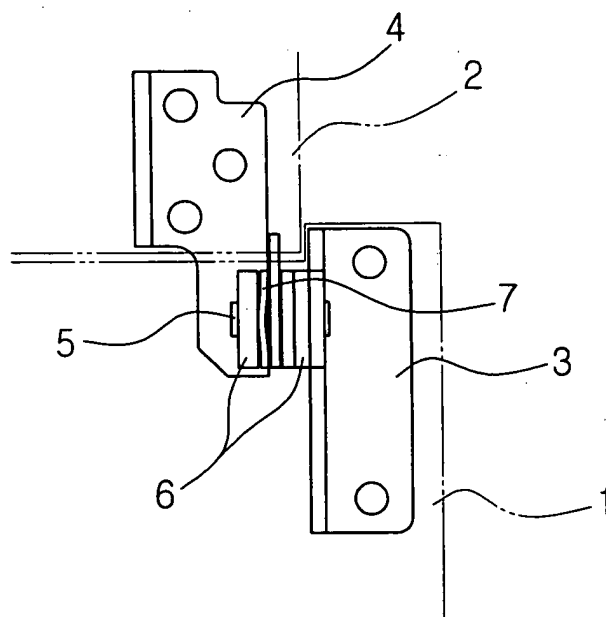


FIG. 2

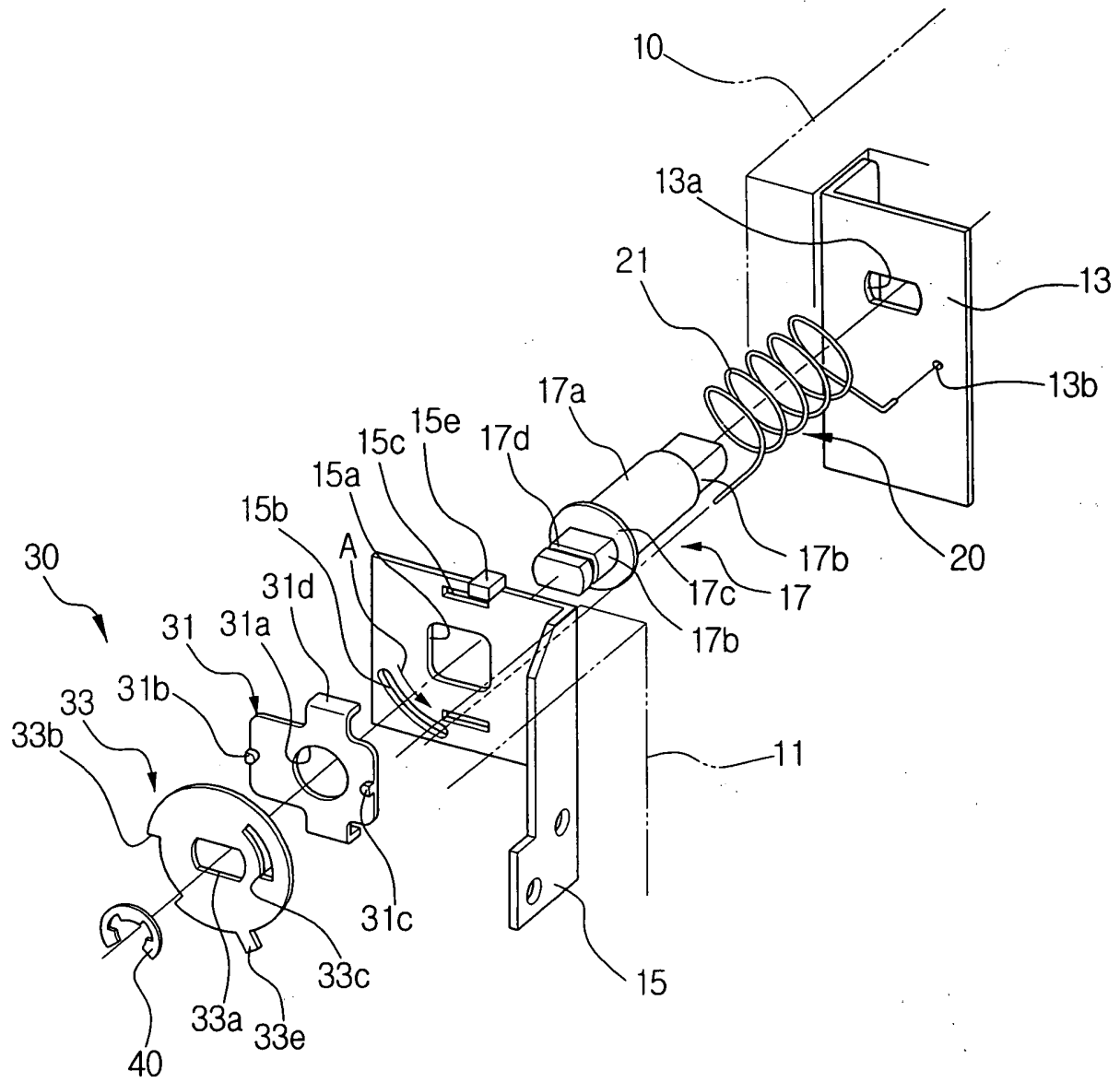


FIG.3

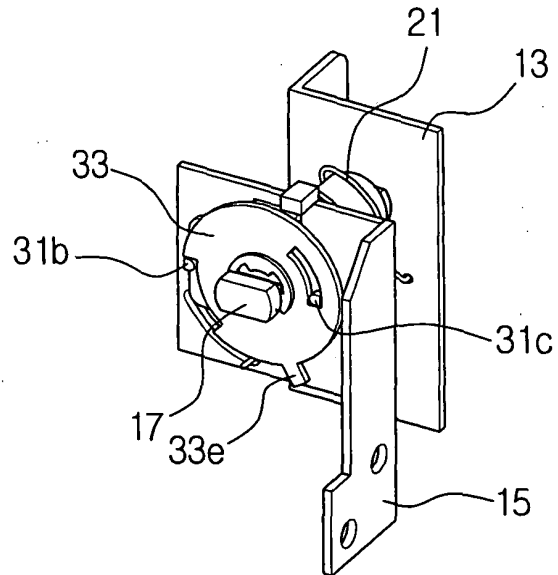


FIG.4A

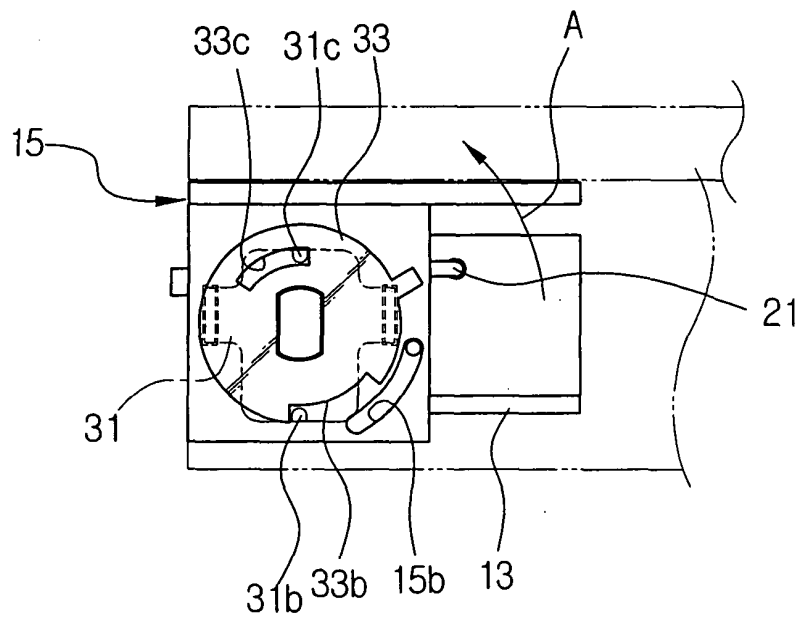


FIG. 4B

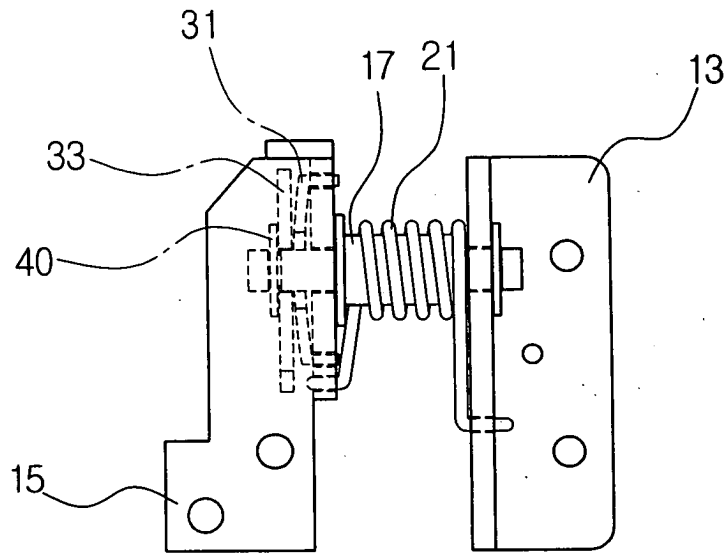


FIG.5

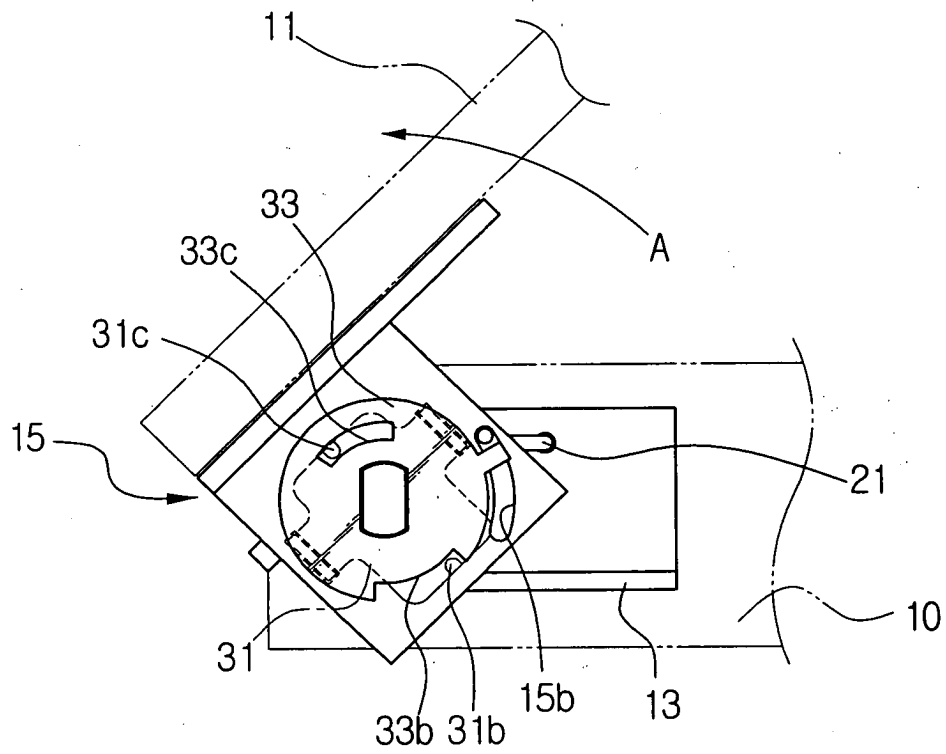


FIG.6A

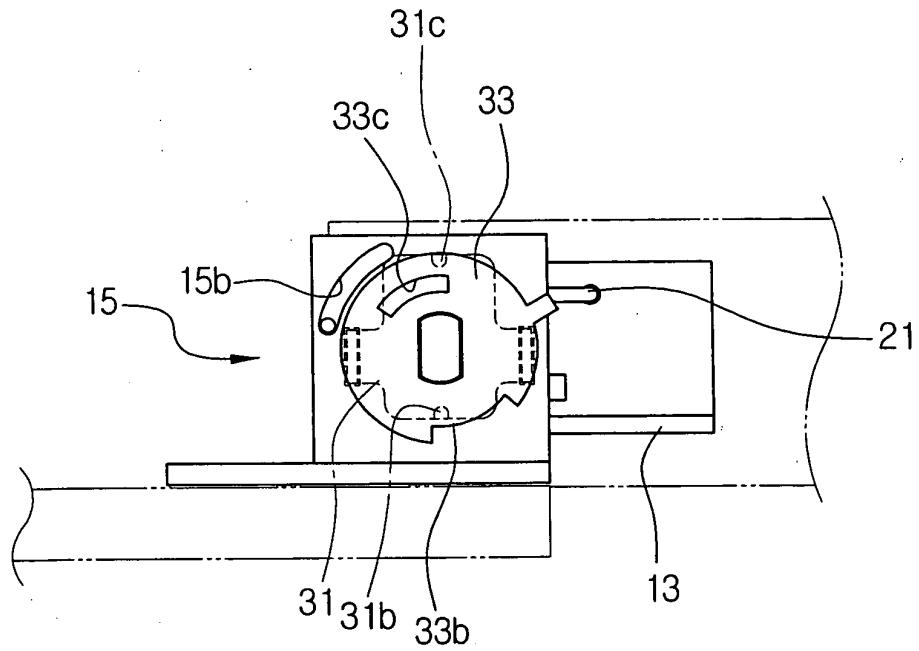


FIG.6B

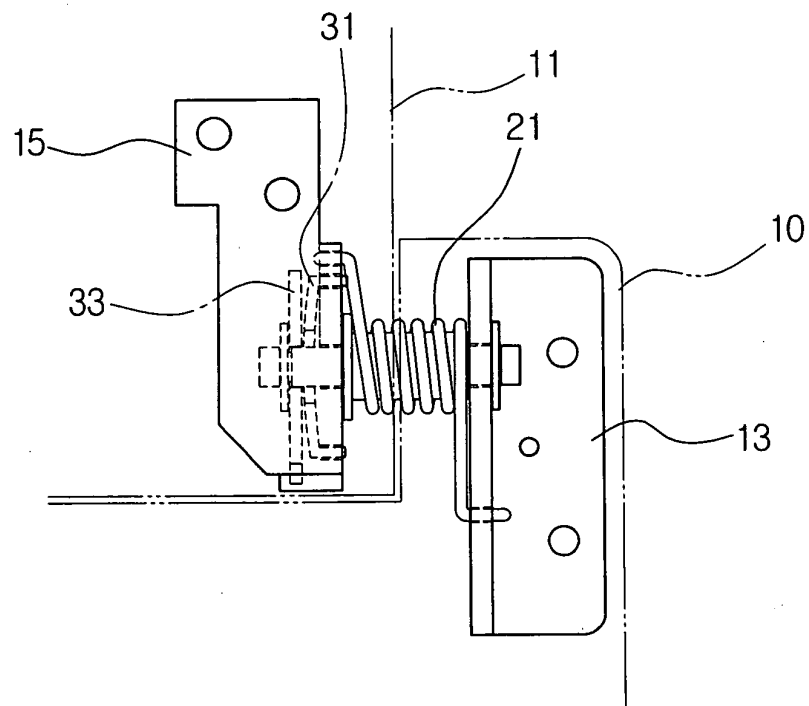
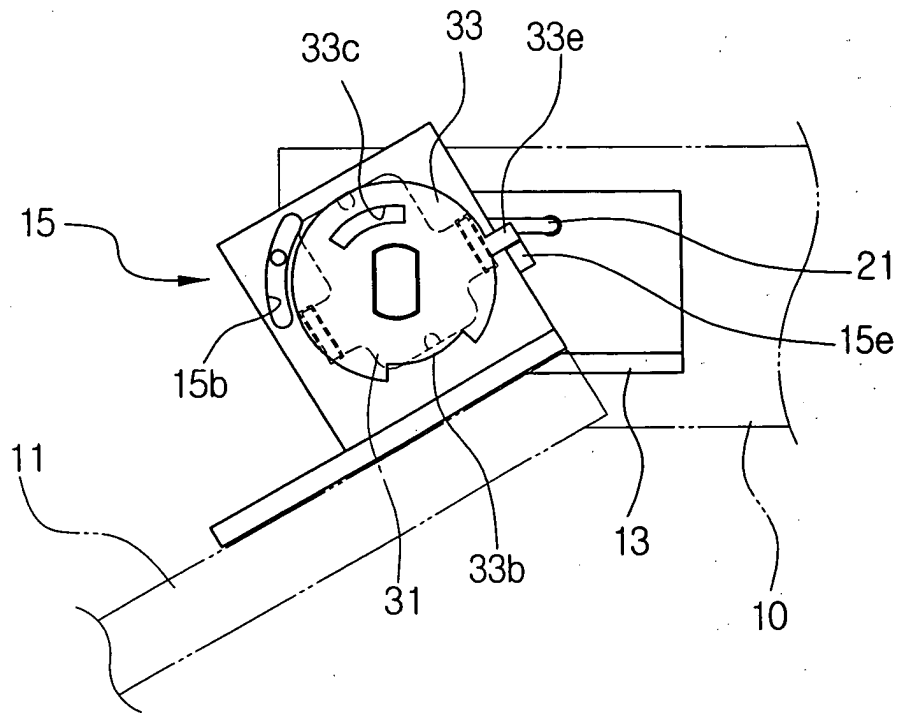


FIG. 7





European Patent
Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 03 02 2069

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)
X	US 5 028 913 A (KITAMURA YOSHIHARU) 2 July 1991 (1991-07-02)	1,2	E05D11/08 E05F1/12
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			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7)
			E05D E05F
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search MUNICH		Date of completion of the search 12 November 2003	Examiner Di Renzo, R
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			

EPO FORM 1503 03/02 (P04C01)

**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

EP 03 02 2069

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report.
The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
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12-11-2003

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